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President: Mr. Han Seung-soo ..... (Republic of Korea)

In the absence of the President, Mr. Rosenthal (Guatemala), Vice-President, took the Chair.

The meeting was called to order at 10.15 a.m.

Agenda item 38

Assistance in mine action

Report of the Secretary-General (A/56/448 and Add.1 and 2)

The Acting President (*spoke in Spanish*): Before turning to the list of speakers, I should like to inform delegates that in a letter dated 22 October, addressed to the President of the General Assembly, the Permanent Representative of Ireland to the United Nations, in his capacity as Chairman of the Group of Western European and Other States for the month of October, requests that the General Assembly hear in plenary meeting a statement by the Observer of Switzerland in the debate on agenda item 38. In view of the importance attached to the issue under discussion, it is proposed that the General Assembly accept that request.

There being no objection, it is so decided.

We will now proceed to the debate. The first speaker on my list is the representative of Belgium, who will speak on behalf of the countries of the European Union.

Mr. De Loecker (Belgium) (*spoke in French*): I have the honour of speaking on behalf of the European Union. The countries of Central and Eastern Europe associated with the European Union — Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia — and the associated countries Cyprus, Malta and Turkey, as well as Iceland and Liechtenstein as European Free Trade Association countries members of the European Economic Area, associate themselves with this statement.

The events of recent weeks have shown us again that anti-personnel mines are a major humanitarian problem. The situation in Afghanistan — one of the countries most affected by unexploded mines and ordnance — is a sad illustration of this fact. According to the International Committee of the Red Cross, between March 1998 and December 2000 at least 2,812 people were the victims of unexploded mines or devices. Last year, a quarter of the victims were people on the move, either because they were fleeing conflict or drought or because they were nomads. Beyond the catastrophic human effects, these devices have equally immense social and economic consequences for post-conflict development and the restoration of normal social conditions. The presence of mines is very often an obstacle to the distribution of humanitarian aid, since in many cases it means that detours have to be made to reach the population.

Regrettably, these observations hold for many regions of the world. That is why the European Union considers mines a fundamental problem and has made them one of its priorities. The European Union believes that mine action is the best response to this scourge,

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since it deals with the problem on a global scale. The five components of such action are complementary and deal with different aspects of the issue. Education and making people aware of the danger of mines are the fundamental stages. It is supremely important to ensure that, as far as possible, civilians living near mined areas do not join the already long list of victims. Assistance to the victims is also a major pillar of mine action. Aid to these people and their reintegration into society are fundamental aspects. Mine clearance is also essential and must be carried out as a matter of priority in places that are likely to affect the civilian population. It is also essential to ensure that areas cleared of mines are not mined again. That is why it is important to promote both international legal instruments on anti-personnel mines and the destruction of stockpiled landmines — which is the fifth component of mine action.

To ensure optimum allocation of resources, the European Union considers that the action being conducted must be kept under constant review. We have to ensure that we are doing enough. We believe that it is vital to see if any suitable improvements can be made. We also stress the need for effective coordination at the national level in order to draw up national action plans; plan the supply of services; facilitate the formulation of policies; remedy or avert any shortcomings in the services provided; ensure the fair allocation of such services; facilitate the sharing of information; reinforce national capacities; ensure that the beneficiaries of the activities are involved in them and are able to take control of them; coordinate research; and, finally, ensure coordination of the activities of all parties concerned, both inside and outside the country.

European Union support for mine action is expressed in particular by the draft resolution that it submits each year to the General Assembly under the agenda item being discussed today. Through its member States and the European Commission, the European Union is the leading provider of funds to mine action. In 2000 its total contributions totalled 125 million euros, and the Union alone provides more than 50 per cent of the total contributions to the Trust Fund. The European Union has also adopted two regulations aimed at strengthening its campaign against mines, and it will also continue to provide assistance to scientific initiatives and research aimed at devising more effective mine-clearance techniques.

The European Union is determined to continue its joint efforts to achieve the total elimination of anti-personnel mines throughout the world. It encourages all States actively to participate in the intersessional mechanism in Geneva relating to the Convention on the prohibition of anti-personnel mines. We welcome the ever-growing number of States parties to that Convention — 122 to date. The Third Meeting of States Parties, held in Managua last September, represented an opportunity to affirm once again the commitment of all States parties to eradicating, as quickly as possible, these cruel and cowardly weapons.

The Secretary-General's report on assistance in mine action is, for the European Union, a confirmation of the remarkable progress that has been made in the area of mine action, and especially as regards optimized strategic planning, operational support, coordination and information management. As regards planning, the mine-action strategy developed by the United Nations Mine Action Service (UNMAS) for the period 2001-2005 is very important for the transparency and further elaboration of the United Nations policy on mines.

The European Union supports the development — as provided for in the strategy — of emergency-reaction plans in order to promote rapid intervention in emergency situations in the context of both humanitarian and peacekeeping operations. This is in line with the report of the Panel on United Nations Peace Operations. Another important operational development is the continuing improvement in the monitoring of the quality of mine operations, and in particular the revision of the International Mine Action Standards, in cooperation with the Geneva International Centre for Humanitarian Demining. The European Union welcomes the fact that these very useful demining standards have been revised and that they will be supplemented by others, including standards for awareness-raising programmes and for the destruction of stocks. This ongoing process will eventually lead to a full range of standards dealing with all aspects of mine action. The European Union is convinced that the use of these standards will result in an appreciable reduction in the number of victims of anti-personnel mines, especially women and children.

The European Union welcomes the recommendation of the Panel on Peace Operations that UNMAS should become a division of the Department of Peacekeeping Operations and that two additional

posts should be created. This is but a just recognition of UNMAS's coordinating role in the area of mine action.

The true value of these contributions and these untiring efforts is referred to in the draft resolution on assistance in mine action submitted by the European Union. We hope that the draft will receive the widest possible support and that it will be adopted, as in previous years, by consensus.

I should like to conclude by paying tribute once again to all of those who are involved, closely or from afar, in this daily struggle against the scourge of mines, be it be through the United Nations, Governments, international organizations or non-governmental organizations. They all deserve our strong support in their efforts to help relieve the suffering of the victims and to ensure that this inhuman weapon does not cause any more of them.

Mr. Khalid (Pakistan): For the past decade we have been discussing the consequences of the indiscriminate use of landmines, which continue to haunt the civilian population in various parts of the world. It is alarming to note that over 60 developing countries — including Afghanistan, Angola, Ethiopia, Burundi, Somalia and Bosnia and Herzegovina — are suffering because of the irresponsible use of landmines as a result of foreign occupation or internal conflicts. The civilian population has been the main victim of landmines and unexploded ordnance, which has caused serious social and economic problems.

Today in Afghanistan alone there are over 10 million landmines scattered all over the country, which is perhaps the largest mine-strewn area in the world. Most landmine victims are civilians. We are particularly concerned because of the casualties resulting from the landmines. The victims are treated at hospitals in Pakistan, which are already burdened due to the presence of over 3 million Afghan refugees in our country.

My delegation has taken careful note of the Secretary-General's report entitled "Assistance in mine action", as contained in document A/56/448 and its addenda 1 and 2. We are grateful to the Secretary-General for chalking out a five-year strategy, beginning in 2001, for the United Nations Mine Action Programme. We have taken due note of this strategy, which focuses on obtaining comprehensive information regarding mine-infested areas and proposes emergency response and assistance to national and local authorities. It is also important that the United Nations has given due emphasis to coordination and to resource mobilization as a part of its strategy.

We have also taken note of the United Nations document entitled "Portfolio of Mine-related Projects". This document provides an overview of individual country programmes and the involvement of various United Nations agencies in mine action activities. However, we have noted with concern the large gap that lies between the enormity of the task of clearing mines and unexploded ordnance in various countries, especially Afghanistan, and the scarcity of resources available for the realization of those tasks. We are particularly concerned about the situation in Afghanistan, where millions of Afghan refugees are reluctant to repatriate while the threat of mines and unexploded ordnance exists. The primarily agrarian economy of Afghanistan cannot be rehabilitated until contaminated land is cleared. Similarly, casualties as a result of landmines place an enormous strain on the already overburdened hospital system, and vital emergency and assistance aid is hindered by the presence of mines and unexploded ordnance.

Pakistan, for its part, has actively contributed to demining operations in several affected countries. Our participation in demining operations in Kuwait, Cambodia, Angola, Bosnia and Western Sahara reflects our commitment.

Pakistan declared a moratorium on the export of landmines in 1997. We have also ratified Amended Protocol II to the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons and have submitted information pursuant to article 11(2) and article 13(4) of Amended Protocol II. We remain ready to consider further measures and initiatives in the relevant multilateral forums to address the problems arising out of the indiscriminate use of landmines.

Mr. Kittikhoun (Lao People's Democratic Republic): At the outset, I would like to convey my appreciation to the Secretary-General for his comprehensive report on assistance in mine action, which highlights key developments as well as significant achievements and challenges faced by the international community. Such an informative report will surely help us in shaping our future activities.

Although significant achievements have been recorded in the field of assistance in mine action since

1993, innocent people are still being either injured or killed today by landmines and other unexploded ordnance scattered on the surface or buried in the soil of several countries around the world. Much more remains to be done in response to the challenges before us. In dealing with this issue, my delegation would like to emphasize some issues that, in our view, are of particular concern. As we all know full well, the number of countries that require and request assistance in mine action programmes continues to increase, while the availability of resources is limited. The unpredictable flow of resources poses a challenge to effectively realizing these programmes. Therefore, every effort should be made to intensify international cooperation, promote coordination between all partners and provide adequate resources in order to ensure the full implementation of the policy and strategy for mine action.

While recognizing that the primary responsibility lies with national Governments, more complementary international support is required in countries where the scale of mine- and unexploded-ordnance contamination is widespread and severe. In that regard, my delegation fully supports the Secretary-General's observations contained in paragraph 105 of his report on assistance in mine action, issued under the symbol A/56/448. The report stresses the need to obtain adequate resources in response to the increasing needs, while calling upon the United Nations system to provide assistance in areas affected by mines and unexploded ordnance and urging the international community to redouble its effort to support the implementation of the United Nations strategy.

No other country in the history of warfare has withstood the kind of aerial bombardment that our country, the Lao People's Democratic Republic, underwent between 1964 and 1973, during the Indochina war. The legacy, largely unknown to the international community, was the dropping of over 3 million tonnes of explosive ordnance on our small country. As a consequence, the Lao People's Democratic Republic is today still seriously affected by millions of leftover unexploded ordnance scattered throughout the country. In fact, unexploded ordnance contamination directly causes fear, injury, death and stunted socio-economic development. Indeed, it constitutes one of the root causes of poverty in our country.

Although the war ended more than 25 years ago, remaining unexploded ordnance indiscriminately maims and kills innocent people upon detonation. Since the end of the war, about 12,000 accidents related to unexploded ordnance have been recorded, including 6,000 deaths. Today, accidents involving unexploded ordnance occur somewhere in the country every two days. Most alarming of all is the fact that children account for more than one third of all casualties.

In order to address this problem, in 1996 our Government drew up a comprehensive programme whose objective is to reduce the number of civilian casualties from unexploded ordnance and to increase the amount of land available for food production and other development activities. A trust fund for the clearance of unexploded ordnance has been established, in cooperation with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the objective of which is to channel earmarked and non-earmarked contributions to the programme, which focuses on four components: community awareness; training and capacity-building; surveying; and clearance.

It is important to note that significant successes have been achieved in our efforts to nationalize the programme. More than 1,125 Lao staff are now performing their duties without the assistance of foreign experts. A national standard operating procedure has also been developed and the cost-effectiveness of operations has been improved. In addition, last year about 743 hectares of land were cleared and 80,000 items of unexploded ordnance were destroyed. Nearly 200,000 people have been briefed on the dangers of unexploded ordnance. As a result, the number of accidents has been reduced.

We hope to achieve further positive results in the years to come. Let me, on behalf of the Lao Government, express my sincere thanks to the Governments of Australia, Belgium, Canada, Denmark, Japan, Finland, France, Germany, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Sweden, the United States of America and the United Kingdom, as well as to UNDP, UNICEF and the European Union, for the technical and financial support they have extended to us in our endeavours to overcome this problem. It is our fervent hope that the Lao unexploded ordnance programme will continue to receive necessary financial support from our donors, both bilateral and

multilateral, in order to enable it to accomplish the task assigned to it.

Landmines and unexploded ordnance continue to be an issue of profound humanitarian concern for the international community. From this perspective, let us work hard together to address this problem, thereby giving those living under the threat of landmines and unexploded ordnance a chance to enjoy a peaceful and productive existence. It is our belief that, through concerted global effort and with the United Nations as a focal point, we can guarantee the most effective response to the tasks assigned to us.

Mr. Hønningstad (Norway): Anti-personnel landmines are weapons of terror that affect innocent civilians. They represent a threat to economic and social development. They threaten the recovery of war-torn communities.

The mine-ban Convention of 1997 was adopted for the purpose of helping resolve this humanitarian crisis. Since its inception, we have witnessed a dramatic decrease in the production of and trade in anti-personnel mines, as well as steady progress in their destruction and clearing. There are fewer new mine victims, and the level of funding for mine action is still increasing. The Third Meeting of the States Parties to the Convention took place in Managua in September this year. Although overshadowed by the tragic events of 11 September, it was a positive meeting, reflecting the progress made, particularly in the host country and surrounding region.

These developments are encouraging, but they are not enough. Landmines still represent a threat to millions of people; they continue to cause tremendous human suffering; they are a significant obstacle to economic and social progress. In short, they continue to constitute a humanitarian crisis.

The universalization of the Convention continues to be high on our agenda. In total, 122 States have ratified the mine-ban Convention. There are still many States, however, that have not signed or ratified it. Landmines are allegedly being used in 23 current conflicts, and they are being deployed even as we gather here. The fact that 15 Governments and 30 rebel groups are using these weapons is, quite simply, unacceptable. One State party may even be violating the provisions of the Convention. This is highly disturbing.

Unlike many other international processes, the Ottawa process has managed to achieve a strong partnership between Governments and the non-governmental organization (NGO) community. NGOs are indispensable partners for the implementation of mine-action programmes. They serve an important monitoring role. Their professionalism and tireless efforts have been indispensable and will be imperative for our common endeavours. We are grateful for and dependent on the continued cooperative relationship with the NGOs, in particular the International Campaign to Ban Landmines and the International Committee of the Red Cross.

In the implementation of the Convention, the Geneva International Centre for Humanitarian Demining is playing an increasingly important role. Without its support, the international work programme could hardly have been carried out. At the Third Meeting of the States Parties to the Convention in Managua, it was agreed that an implementation support unit should be established as part of the Geneva Centre. Norway sees this as a positive next step in the implementation process.

The United Nations Mine Action Service will play a central role in the United Nations mine-action strategy for the next five years by promoting a strategic and coordinated collective response to the global landmine challenge. Norway looks forward to the continued United Nations focus on its role in improving the coordination of mine action within the United Nations system.

In the days ahead we will face several challenges in our work to free the world from mines. The future of funding is closely linked to the importance of the coordination of mine-action activities. Landmine Monitor Report 2001 reports that funding for mine action is generally increasing. This is positive, but we should be realistic. An equally high level of funding for the future cannot be taken for granted. We must therefore make sure that available resources are used in the best possible way. All relevant actors must support each other in this process. Mine-affected States must take ownership of mine-action activities. It is essential that mine action respond to local needs. Effective coordination at the national and local levels is key to ensuring the efficiency of our mine-action efforts.

The Norwegian pledge to allocate $120 million over a five-year period stands, but beyond that period,

we will also continue to be engaged in this issue, politically and financially. Together with other donors, we will seek arrangements to secure adequate funding.

We will continue to attach great importance to assistance to mine victims. We earmark specific Norwegian funds for such activities. Simultaneously, assistance to mine victims must be the responsibility of the mine-affected countries themselves. Physical, social and psychological rehabilitation, as well as the reintegration of landmine survivors, must be part of national health and social programmes. As part of our efforts to ensure national ownership of humanitarian mine action and victim assistance, Norway encourages the establishment of local support structures. One example is the initiative taken by the Landmine Survivors Network to establish survivors' advocates from mine-affected countries. Norway supports that initiative.

We must focus on implementation at the field level. A large amount of money is invested in technological research and development. There will still be a need for improvement and more efficient methods. However, research and development should be coordinated with the agencies in the field and focused on operational needs and conditions on the ground.

A great challenge to the Convention is compliance. It is imperative that all obligations under the Convention be met by the States parties. This is necessary in order to secure the credibility and integrity of the Convention.

Most of the victims of landmines are innocent civilians with no connection to the conflict which initiated the deployment of the mines. We are dealing with real people here: children, women and men. Human beings must be the focus of all humanitarian mine action. Our purpose is to stop human suffering as a result of the use of landmines.

Mr. Yamamoto (Japan): In collaboration with the international community, Japan has vigorously addressed the many aspects of mine action: mine clearance, mine awareness, victim assistance, the destruction of stockpiled landmines and advocacy. However, it is a stark reality that countless landmines remain to be cleared and the number of landmine victims is still reportedly at least 150,000 a year, many of whom are women and children. Given the fact that the remaining landmines continue to hamper post-conflict rehabilitation and development and to pose a serious threat to human security, it is imperative to strengthen our commitment to tackling landmine problems.

I would like to take this opportunity to share with the Assembly some of the efforts that the Government of Japan has made in the realm of mine action.

In essence, Japan has maintained a comprehensive dual-track approach consisting of endeavours to achieve a universal and effective ban on landmines, on the one hand, and strengthening assistance for mine clearance and victim assistance, on the other. I am therefore pleased to see that the number of States parties now stands at 122 and hope that other countries will join the Ottawa Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-personnel Mines and on Their Destruction at the earliest possible stage. In this connection, it was a great honour for Japan to have facilitated the Third Meeting of the States Parties to the Convention held in Managua, Nicaragua, in September, as a Vice-President of the Meeting and as Co-Chair of the Standing Committee on Victim Assistance, Socio-Economic Reintegration and Mine Awareness of the Convention.

In the fields of mine clearance and victim assistance, Japan has continued to make considerable financial contributions through a variety of multilateral and bilateral channels. For instance, it distributed a total of $5.7 million in the last fiscal year to a range of mine-action projects around the world. Furthermore, fully appreciating the initiatives taken by the United Nations Mine Action Service (UNMAS), as described in the reports of the Secretary-General, Japan has contributed nearly $10 million to the United Nations Voluntary Trust Fund for Assistance in Mine Action, managed by UNMAS, over the past four years.

Together with these financial contributions, the Government of Japan has striven to support a variety of mine-action activities. Today, let me focus on four particular areas to which Japan has attached priority.

First, the protection and education of women and children under armed conflict is of great importance. With a view to reducing injuries among children by providing high-quality information and conducting educational activities, Japan has made a contribution to facilitate the development of the international standards for mine awareness education.

Secondly, it is crucial to assure the safety and security of deminers. For every 1,500 landmines cleared, one deminer is reportedly victimized. I would like to pay the highest tribute to the great dedication of deminers, who sometimes sacrifice their safety or even their lives so that others may be safe. From this viewpoint, my Government has decided to continue to support the revision, production and dissemination of the information materials concerning safety to be used by deminers and other beneficiaries.

Thirdly, Japan has long attached great importance to victim assistance. Not only must medical and psychological assistance and artificial limbs be provided, but employment opportunities must be created and assistance extended to achieve reintegration into society. These are the keys to enhancing the well-being of landmine victims and, on the basis of this belief, Japan has supported projects on victim assistance in Cambodia and Afghanistan.

Fourthly, the great role that civil society can play should be duly acknowledged. The Government of Japan has supported Japanese as well as international and local non-governmental organizations in their efforts to tackle mine-related issues.

Let me briefly touch upon our support for Afghanistan as one of the neediest countries. Over the last 13 years, Japan has contributed a total of $21 million to various mine-related activities in Afghanistan, including mine-clearance projects managed by the United Nations Office for Humanitarian Assistance to Afghanistan and victim assistance overseen by UNMAS. Despite the current fluid and complex situation on the ground, long-term prospects for reconstruction and development are also to be taken into consideration when providing emergency humanitarian assistance. In particular, clearance of landmine and unexploded ordinance is crucial to expediting the repatriation and resettlement of refugees and internally displaced persons and the training of personnel and victim assistance are important keys for the effective rehabilitation and reconstruction of the country. The Japanese Government is therefore determined to continue its support for mine action in order to facilitate long-term stability and development in Afghanistan in the post-conflict phase. It is hoped that other stakeholders in the international community will join in this endeavour.

Finally, mine clearance and victim assistance, along with a comprehensive ban on landmines, are prerequisites for ensuring human security. Based upon this view, the Government of Japan reaffirms its commitment to the global fight against landmine problems in collaboration with other members of the mine action community, in order to achieve the goal of zero victims and make the Earth safer for our children and the generations to come.

Mr. De Rivero (Peru) *(spoke in Spanish)*: In recent years, the political will to eradicate anti-personnel mines has undoubtedly increased. It could not be otherwise, because anti-personnel mines are odious weapons that claim innocent victims among the civilian population — especially children — more than 100,000 victims per year.

That is why, when we confront anti-personnel mines, just as when we confront terrorism, there can be no ambiguity. Either we eliminate them, or we accept them with all the physical and psychological damage they cause. In Peru, as with the terrorism of the Sendero Luminoso, we have decided not to be ambiguous with regard to anti-personnel mines: we have destroyed our arsenal.

On 13 September, Peru completed the destruction of its arsenal of 321,368 anti-personnel mines. The destruction of the arsenal has been carried out with the support and verification of representatives of the international community, the United Nations, the Organization of American States, the International Committee of the Red Cross and civil society. We have thus complied with Article 4 of the Ottawa Convention more than a year before the mandatory time limit of four years established by this juridical instrument.

In addition, today we are fully coordinating with the police forces in removing the mines from the 1,400 high-voltage power-line towers that we had to protect during my country's fight against terrorism. To date, the removal of mines has been completed in 242 of those towers.

With the valuable cooperation of the Governments of Canada, Japan and the United Status and of the Organization of American Status, Peru is continuing with the demining of its border with Ecuador. This process has been completed on four kilometres of the nine that constitute the mined area along that border.

Furthermore, we have agreed with Ecuador to establish a zone free of anti-personnel mines between our countries. We have also pledged with Chile to continue to comply with the provisions of the Ottawa Convention. Chile and Peru have reaffirmed their commitment to eliminating the mines on their common border as soon as possible.

Peru has been widely recognized by the international community for the special attention that it has given to destroying its arsenals and demining. In fact, at the Third Meeting of States Parties to the Ottawa Convention, which was held in Managua, Peru was commended for having disposed of its arsenals in much less time than expected and also because, as the result of our experience with mine clearance, we have offered technical cooperation to other States that need it, since we have developed a low-cost explosive technology that is easy to transport and has few residual and polluting effects.

Our anti-mine policy does not end with the demining of our own territory and our borders. We will continue to fight against anti-personnel mines and their harmful effects, and that is why a Peruvian mine action centre will soon be established in Lima. It will be called "Contraminas", and its goals will include the promotion and full implementation of the Ottawa Convention. This centre will operate as a body within the Ministry of Foreign Relations.

Our mine clearance policy is part of a most ambitious objective of Peru's foreign policy, namely, to reduce weapons expenditures in South America in order to devote those resources to social investment. Through this policy, we wish to make Latin America — which was the first nuclear-weapon-free zone — the first anti-personnel-mine-free zone. As a first step towards this Latin American objective, Peru is coordinating its efforts with those of the other Andean countries to declare the Andean region an anti-personnel-mine-free zone.

Mr. Al-Awad (Sudan) (*spoke in Arabic*): The General Assembly is meeting once again to consider the agenda item on Assistance in Mine Action. We take this opportunity to thank the Secretary-General for his exhaustive report on this topic.

As a country that has been a victim of mines and their danger, the Sudan supports all international efforts to eliminate the danger posed by anti-personnel landmines. Since there are many civilian victims in the Sudan, we were among the first countries to sign the Ottawa Convention against anti-personnel landmines. We also participated in all international and regional conferences on mine clearance. Our delegation welcomed the entry into force of the Convention in March 1999. We also welcomed the conclusions reached by the meeting of the States parties, held in Managua, Nicaragua, in September 2001. In this regard, we also support the Government of Nicaragua's efforts to make that conference a success. We also welcome the contents of the report, which tells us that anti-personnel landmines, their stockpiling and transfer have been considerably reduced since the Convention's entry into force.

The Sudanese delegation has taken due note of the fact in the report that the United Nations system has drawn up a five-year strategy on anti-personnel landmines and demining activities. We hope that the departments involved will take into account the views of countries affected by mines in a fully transparent manner, as necessary.

Paragraph 57 of the Secretary-General's report indicates that mines continue to be found in conflict areas in southern Sudan. In this connection, the Government of the Sudan respects the Ottawa Convention both in letter and in spirit. The terrorist rebel movement is responsible for planting these mines. The rebels have ignored all warnings against planting mines. They have placed mines in a number of areas in southern Sudan thereby reducing economic activity, especially in agriculture, because people have had to leave their homes to save their children's lives and their own.

We welcome United Nations efforts to increase awareness of the danger of mines, particularly through the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Refugees, the United Nation's Children's Fund and the International Committee of the Red Cross, which are working alongside the Sudanese National Demining Committee and the Sudanese Red Crescent. This is reflected in the Secretary-General's report. In this context, we also welcome the efforts to set up a mine action unit within the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs for the Sudan, in order to continue mine-awareness efforts and to offer assistance to victims.

As a signatory State of the Convention on landmines, we hope that all the signatory countries will

receive equal treatment regarding demining assistance. Resources, equipment, technology and adequate financial sources should be channelled appropriately in order to help the efforts of demining in affected countries.

As part of demining activities, we have set up a national network, under the auspices of the Ministry for Foreign Affairs, that brings together all organizations involved, for example, the Commissioner for Humanitarian Assistance, the Ministry of the Interior, the Ministry of the Defence, representatives of voluntary and non-governmental organizations and all United Nations bodies and specialized agencies in Khartoum, to discuss all aspects linked to the fight against and the elimination of landmines, as well as to managing their social and economic effects and providing assistance to victims. This national network on mines also provides expertise and advice to governmental institutions responsible for making decisions related to special landmine policies. Establishing this national network demonstrates the Sudanese Government's desire to include all relevant actors involved in demining activities in order to take decisive action on this matter.

Mr. Mubarak (Egypt) (*spoke in Arabic*): Egypt had always attached special interest to issues related to landmines. This can be attributed to the fact that Egypt is one of the States most affected by the problem of landmines, estimated at around 23 million mines and unexploded ordnance spread throughout an area of more than 280,000 hectares of Egyptian soil. The continued presence of these landmines, which were planted by the warring parties in the famous battle of El-Alamein in 1942, not only hinders all efforts to develop this area, but also poses a constant threat to its inhabitants, having claimed the lives of more than 8,000 people, including women, children and the elderly.

In the light of these circumstances, our handling of landmine-related issues stems from real suffering and from the destructive effects that these mines have had on our citizens over the past 50 years. We have handled this on the basis of a sincere desire to create a secure and enabling environment for citizens living in mined areas — areas that also have enormous development, tourist and agricultural potential.

In order to deal with the devastating effects that I have just mentioned and drawing on our limited financial capabilities, our authorities began in July 1991 and continue to work on an ambitious plan to clear our terrain of these landmines. Here I wish to emphasize several key points.

The implementation of this plan places a heavy technical and financial burden, which cannot and should not be confined to the Egyptian Government, which bares no responsibility for planting these landmines. There is an urgent need for the States responsible for planting these mines to submit accurate maps and detailed information on them and to offer assistance in clearing them.

The cost of mine clearance has increased substantially as a result of geological changes, in particular sand movement, which has further obscured most of these landmines throughout the years. Mine clearance requires advanced technology.

The spread of such a great number of landmines over vast area of our lands has crippled all our attempts to utilize the abundant natural resources in this area for the development of the western Sahara.

In line with our continuous efforts to face the problem and effects of landmines, the Egyptian Government had been cooperating for the last three years with the United Nations Mine Action Service. This cooperation was crystallized by sending a United Nations mission to Egypt from 9 to 23 February 2000 to study and assess the landmine problem there.

On 7 July 2000, following that visit, the United Nations issued a comprehensive report on the issue that included practical suggestions and clear guidelines on how to deal with the problem. Egypt will continue its consultations with the United Nations Secretariat and the States concerned in order to activate mine-clearance action taking place in Egypt.

On the other hand, during the year 2000, Egypt had succeeded in putting together a sophisticated mechanism for organizing the essential administrative and technical base for dealing with the problem. This was achieved by creating a high-level national committee to supervise the whole mine-clearance process. The committee includes members from different Ministries and related authorities and is currently working on a number of mine and ordnance clearance projects. It also maintains close contact with the United Nations Development Programme in this area.

We take note of the Secretary-General's report on assistance in mine action (document A/56/448). While welcoming such an annual report as a tool for heightening international awareness of the landmine problem in general, we notice that it has not taken our situation into consideration as one of the States most affected by landmines. This is not in conformity with the report's purpose and basic role.

We believe that the United Nations mine-action strategy for 2001-2005 (document A/56/448/Add.1) is a retreat from the United Nations policy adopted in 1998. It lacks sufficient detail about the needs of affected States. We wish to reaffirm here that a United Nations strategy in this domain must take into account the needs of Member States that are most affected by landmines. We believe that the Secretary-General must seek the views of Member States on this proposed strategy and then review it in the light of the views expressed.

Finally, with regard to the Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-personnel Mines and on Their Destruction — namely, the Ottawa Convention — we would like to assert once more that, in spite of our support for the humanitarian purpose of the Convention, Egypt, like many other States, continues to have numerous reservations, as has been highlighted in many other international forums. That is why we are calling for a more thorough study of the landmine issue in the international negotiating forum directly related to the problem — namely, the Conference on Disarmament. This should be done with the aim of overcoming the shortcomings of the Ottawa Convention, principally ignoring the primary responsibility of States that have planted landmines in the territories of other States to assist in removing them; not providing for the necessary assistance in that regard; and not paying any attention to the right and responsibility of States to secure and defend their national borders.

The path to a world free of landmines is a long and arduous one that requires that the international community contribute towards the expense of achieving such a ban. For this reason, we favour economic development and the saving of the lives of the thousands of people claimed every year.

Mr. Kasemsarn (Thailand): During the Third Meeting of the States Parties to the Ottawa Convention, held in Managua on 18 to 21 September 2001, one of the most poignant testimonies was given by a priest whose young son was severely injured when he accidentally stepped on a landmine. As the priest cradled the boy in his arms, trying desperately to assuage his pain, his eyes roamed the area, and he saw a sign about three feet away from where the explosion had taken place that ironically proclaimed for all to see: "National Sanctuary." It seems that in this sad case, as in thousands of other similar sad stories around the world, there is no sanctuary from the indiscriminate effects of anti-personnel landmines, especially for innocent civilians who are often the unfortunate victims.

These immense humanitarian concerns remain one of the main driving forces behind Thailand's commitment to the Ottawa Convention on banning landmines and to the eventual establishment of a mine-free world. This commitment manifests itself through our concrete action at the national, regional and global levels.

At the national level, through the efforts of the Thailand Mine Action Centre, we have completed the destruction of 117,557 landmines in stock this year and plan to destroy the remaining stockpile by April 2003, as required by the Ottawa Convention. Our efforts in the area of mine clearance are spearheaded by three humanitarian mine action units created in 1999 to demine the infested border areas. Plans are both in place and in the pipeline to support victim assistance and to promote mine-awareness programmes.

We believe that the effectiveness of national efforts would be greatly enhanced if complemented by regional cooperation activities. Thailand, therefore, in cooperation with Handicap International, and with the assistance of Switzerland, Germany and Norway, took the initiative of hosting the first-ever Regional Conference on Mine Victim Assistance from 6 to 8 November 2001. The Lao People's Democratic Republic, Cambodia, Vietnam and Myanmar also participated as observers in this landmark event. Such conferences encourage the adoption of regional approaches and cooperative ventures to help find the most effective and feasible means for victim assistance.

On the global front, Thailand will continue to play an active role in the Ottawa process. Indeed, we would like to encourage others who have not done so to do likewise. For our part, we are proud to serve as co-

Chairman of the Standing Committee on the General Status and Operation of the Convention for the period from 2001-2002, and we will work together with all concerned to advance the goals of the Ottawa Convention.

None of the aforementioned activities could have had any significant impact on the landmine problem without cooperation and assistance, either bilateral or multilateral. The resources and expertise that we possess are never enough to achieve all that we want to do — namely, to rid Thailand of the scourge of landmines.

Meaningful partnerships between affected countries and the international community, including international organizations and non-governmental organizations, and the provision of adequate assistance and appropriate expertise to those in need, must therefore be part and parcel of a global cooperative endeavour to create a mine-free world and to alleviate the suffering of mine victims, because, ultimately, the responsibility for mine action can only be a shared one.

Thailand is appreciative of the assistance that we have received thus far from the international community in the area of mine action. The United Nations Mine Action Service (UNMAS), United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and Norwegian People's Aid, just to name a few, have lent a helping hand in mine-action activities, such as conducting impact surveys in Thailand. The United Nations Mine Action Service and the Geneva International Centre for Humanitarian Demining (GICHD) have assisted in the development of an information management system for mine action. Many other countries, through bilateral programmes, have played their part. We wish to take this opportunity to express our profound thanks to these actors for their participation and contributions.

The partnership between mine-affected countries and the international community must continue, however, and the assistance flowing from such a partnership must be sustained if we are to keep the momentum towards the ultimate establishment of a mine-free world. Such partnerships and assistance should by no means be confined to State parties to the Ottawa Convention alone. Until we make the Ottawa process universal, partnerships and assistance should be extended to all mine-affected countries.

As to our region of South-East Asia, while being aware of particular concerns of States, Thailand hopes that one day all of South-East Asia will be fully part of the Ottawa family. In this connection, we were gratified to see many countries of the Association of South-East Asian Nations (ASEAN) attend the Third Meeting of States Parties to the Ottawa Convention in Managua at such a high level. We hope that this positive trend will continue and bear fruit. But until the day that the Convention is universally accepted, we pledge to work closely with all South-East Asian countries to tackle the multifaceted challenges that landmines pose to our peoples and to our security, and call on the international community to extend to all the mine-affected countries in the region their cooperation and assistance.

Ms. Rivero (Uruguay) (*spoke in Spanish*): My delegation wishes to express its gratitude to the Secretary-General for the comprehensive and useful report submitted in document A/56/448, which has given us a detailed picture of recent mine action and of the activities planned for the period ahead.

We were encouraged to learn that a number of advances were made in 2001, including direct support to 30 countries and the formulation of a five-year strategy for mine action, in spite of the fact that the financial base is not yet as solid as it should be.

In this connection, we hope that the Secretariat will continue to consider provisions regarding the financing of the Mine Action Service, so that it will be possible to obtain the needed resources to continue to implement the different projects already under way and those planned for 2002, without having to depend to such an extent on extra-budgetary contributions.

We were impressed by the level of coordination and cooperation that has been established between the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the Geneva International Centre for Humanitarian Demining, and by the various activities, new programmes, seminars and training courses that have been carried out.

We also attach genuine importance to the work done in the area of information, both in continuing to improve the Information Management System for Mine Action and in preparing the Electronic Mine Information Network (E-MINE), which we hope will serve adequately to provide the data needed.

Uruguay, which has participated in United Nations peacekeeping operations for half a century, attaches great importance to the landmine and unexploded ordnance safety project that is being coordinated by the Mine Action Service, and also to the material that has been published, i.e. safety manuals, videotapes and brochures, and the training courses that have been carried out. We hope that the United Nations Office for Project Services will continue to carry this project out and, if possible, increase its scope.

Uruguay's specialized military personnel, which has been cooperating in many mine actions in different countries, has training and equipment that we hope will also be useful in this field. Our country shares the objective that, at the national and global levels, every effort must be made to reduce the production and use of landmines.

It is for this reason that on 4 May of this year the Government of Uruguay promulgated law 17,327, which incorporated the Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-personnel Mines and on Their Destruction into our national legislation.

We also attach special importance to the preparation in early 2001 of a plan for a rapid emergency mine-action response capability, building on lessons learned from support provided to missions. It is obvious that this plan will make it possible to ensure greater efficiency in the activities that will be conducted. This is why we completely support it.

For all of these reasons, Uruguay supports the draft resolution that has been introduced and that we hope will be adopted by consensus.

Mr. Laurin (Canada): On behalf of the Government of Canada, I wish to express our appreciation to the Secretary-General for again providing a comprehensive report on mine action. We commend the United Nations system for its efforts, and we extend our gratitude to all United Nations personnel who have worked tirelessly on this important matter over the past year.

Once again the Secretary-General has highlighted the central issue before us: while significant progress is being made to address the terror of landmines, many challenges remain. It is not incidental that the main challenges are in those States or areas where the Ottawa Convention has yet to be accepted.

Through its unequivocal ban on anti-personnel landmines and its provisions on cooperation and assistance, the Ottawa Convention provides the international community with a comprehensive framework to address the global landmine problem. More than 120 States have now formally accepted this important humanitarian instrument, but more must be done to convince non-States parties to forgo this insidious weapon. We are pleased, therefore, that a priority has been placed on advocacy against the use of anti-personnel mines.

Of course, United Nations efforts in mine action go far beyond advocacy. As the Secretary-General has duly noted, the United Nations plays a leading role in all of the following areas: global coordination and resource mobilization, emergency and ongoing assistance to mine-affected countries and areas, information management and quality management, training and standards. During the past year, the United Nations has proven through its commitment that it is the indispensable coordinating centre of our common efforts.

We note with appreciation that the United Nations system provides direct support to 30 countries. In addition to that continued work, the United Nations has demonstrated in Croatia and Kosovo that its support can and should ultimately reach the stage where high levels of international assistance can be significantly reduced over time.

With respect to information management, quality management, training and standards, we applaud the work of the United Nations and partner institutions such as the Geneva International Centre for Humanitarian Demining. The completion of international standards for mine action, the further deployment of the Information Management System for Mine Action and the enhancement of the training of mine-action personnel contribute to improvements in how the global community addresses the global landmine problem. The recent establishment of the Electronic Mine Information Network has provided the world with an efficient electronic gateway to a broad range of mine-action information.

When an organization undertakes as many activities with as much global reach as the United Nations does, it is easy to find areas to criticize. Some

will argue that the system is too slow in responding or that the procedures for internal coordination are still unwieldy. But on mine action the United Nations has confronted a global terror in a practical manner with great initiative. It is time that all of us recognized that we are all partners in a common cause. Our shared sense of urgency obliges us to work together in this common effort.

Partnership is a theme that resonates through the Secretary-General's report. Partnership within the United Nations is evident through the activities of the Inter-Agency Coordination Group on Mine Action and through examples such as the fruitful relationship between the United Nations Mine Action Service and the coordination by the United Nations Children's Fund of the Mine Awareness Working Group. The United Nations Department for Disarmament Affairs has ably supported meetings of States parties to the Ottawa Convention and is the key instrument in ensuring the effective transparency of reports submitted under that Convention.

Canada is a partner of the United Nations in mine action on several fronts. Over the past year we have worked closely in areas such as stockpile destruction. We helped in the development of a Web site on that theme. We also provided support to the United Nations landmine and unexploded ordnance safety project and we continue to support the Database of Mine Action Investments.

Partnership has been especially evident over the past year in the development of the United Nations mine-action strategy for 2001 to 2005. That strategy, which we heartily support, has emerged from extensive input from mine-affected and donor countries, field programmes, non-governmental organizations and expert agencies. The strategy is both timely and prudent. It sets out global targets and specific objectives for the United Nations.

Partnership with the private sector is another important area identified in the Secretary-General's report. Providing avenues for individuals, organizations and corporations to contribute to our common cause is an important element in ensuring the sustainability of mine-action efforts. In that regard, I am pleased that the Canadian private sector has become actively engaged in the United Nations Development Programme's Adopt-A-Minefield campaign through the Canadian Landmine Foundation's Night of 1,000 Dinners initiative. Through that initiative, thousands of people worldwide will host or participate in fund-raising and awareness events on or around 30 November 2001.

In addition to sharing a common cause in addressing the global landmine problem, we have a shared responsibility to the memory of those killed as a result of the use of these weapons, and an obligation to assist the victims of landmines. The sad example of Afghanistan, terrorized by landmines in the course of more than two decades of conflict, compels us to reflect on the immediate medical and other needs of landmine survivors and on their social and economic reintegration into their societies. Meeting landmine survivors — most of the civilians and almost half of them children — is the best way to dispel forever the myth of the "responsible use" of landmines. It is the most powerful way of convincing all States that an outright ban on this weapon is the only feasible way forward.

In working towards a world free of the terror of landmines, the keys to our success to date have been our continued partnerships with the United Nations system, with the non-governmental community, with international humanitarian organizations such as the International Committee of the Red Cross and with concerned States and institutions worldwide. Through the leadership offered by the United Nations, we can enhance those partnerships and move forward collectively and collegially. Through the moral suasion of the Organization, we can expand upon our success to date. We can make the Ottawa Convention the standard of universality and comprehensiveness necessary for the total eradication of the scourge of anti-personnel landmines.

Mr. Babaa (Libyan Arab Jamahiriya) (*spoke in Arabic*): The international community has voiced its concern about the problem of anti-personnel landmines and has made tireless efforts to put an end to that problem, from which the entire world has suffered and will suffer for decades until the necessary resources, international determination and political will are forthcoming to put a final end to it. In spite of progress over recent years, endeavours in this sphere have constantly been thwarted. The whole world understands the danger of landmines and their use in war and other armed conflict, in view of the large number of people killed or wounded by these weapons over the past hundred years.

The number of landmine victims exceeds that of the victims of nuclear attacks. But although States have been gradually reducing nuclear arsenals, they have been developing new types of anti-personnel mines, for example those shaped like children's toys, radios, pens, lighters and other small items. This terrible weapon is the most hideous one employed against human beings: mines do not distinguish among adults, children, women, innocent civilians and armed soldiers. It is an insidious weapon that remains on the ground or in the trees to trap, mutilate, handicap or maim people. This means that treatment and rehabilitation require considerable financial and psychological resources.

The real tragedy when mines are used in warfare and armed conflict is that even when conflicts are resolved, wars come to an end, soldiers go home and the cause of the war is forgotten, mines remain a buried, concealed, permanent, daily threat to thousands of men, women and children. Civilians who return to their homes, fields and homelands to live in peace after conflicts have ended are unaware that a hidden enemy awaits them.

A mine is detonated somewhere in the world every 20 minutes. The number of monthly casualties totals around 500 killed and more than 1,200 injured according to some estimates. More than 120 million mines are hidden in forests, deserts, mountains and fields. More than 70 countries are awaiting decisive international action to put an end to this problem once and for all.

The Arab and African regions are among those most affected by mines. In Africa, more than 50 million mines have been laid in 18 States. These mines have maimed approximately 30,000 people, mostly women and children. They are also an enormous obstacle to economic and social development in Africa. Last year's Africa-Europe Summit in Cairo emphasized the need to strengthen efforts to free the African continent of mines, promote an awareness campaign on their dangers, develop the capability of affected countries to eliminate these mines, help and rehabilitate victims and provide the necessary financial and technical infrastructure in these countries.

In the Arab region, 13 countries face this problem, including my own country, Libya. A number of conferences and seminars have been held, some under the aegis of the League of Arab States, to consolidate regional and local efforts to deal with the problem of mines and their harmful impact on economic and social development.

Libya suffers from the problem of mines laid during the Second World War. Past reports of the United Nations mention that Allied and Axis forces left millions of mines and pieces of explosive ordnance in North Africa, which have remained for over 50 years and have taken thousands of innocent victims. In addition, the problem impedes the development of the mine-contaminated regions and the efforts to combat desertification, build roads, exploit natural resources and reclaim agricultural land. These mines are the responsibility of the warring countries that planted them to serve their own military interests without concern for the effects the mines would have on others. That is why international and regional organizations have supported our just claims that these countries should take responsibility for clearing these mines and for paying compensation to the victims.

This is particularly true since the problem of mines is a complex one with many aspects. First, each belligerent State laid its mines in a different way. Secondly, the mine casings can be affected by natural elements, mainly pollution, which makes them much more sensitive and causes many more casualties. As a result, advanced technology is needed to clear such mines and render them ineffective. Thirdly, the mines found in desert areas cannot be easily removed because they have been dispersed due to shifting sands, flash floods and other factors.

My delegation wishes to recall the historic agreement concluded between Italy and Libya in 1998 on cooperation between the two countries for mine action in Libyan territory. It called for paying compensation to the victims, creating a joint fund for the rehabilitation of affected areas, assistance to the handicapped and setting up a medical centre to treat victims maimed by mines.

I should like to express our pleasure at last week's meeting of the technical committee to create a mechanism for the implementation of the agreement, which contains a number of operational steps, including a project on mine clearance and the provision of training for Libyans in detecting mines and other vestiges of war in order to rehabilitate and develop mine-affected areas.

We hope that the Italian side will assume its responsibilities in other areas, including the creation in

Libya of an information centre and data bank containing technical and historical information and documents, aerial photos of the mine fields and maps of the mined areas. This important agreement between Italy and Libya is an excellent precedent. We would call on the other two States that laid mines in Libyan territory during the Second World War to follow Italy's example and conclude similar agreements with my country so that we can be assisted in putting an end to the problem of mines — which has existed for more than 50 years now — and to compensate the Libyan people for the damages they have suffered from these mines.

My country supports the international community's campaign to eliminate the problem of mines and the efforts of the United Nations, its specialized agencies and regional and international organizations, headed by the International Committee of the Red Cross, to alleviate the human suffering caused by these mines, to deal decisively with this complex problem and to provide the necessary assistance and resources for combating it.

We fully support the noble objectives of the Ottawa Convention. However, we believe it lacks certain elements: there is no mention of the legal responsibilities of the States that laid mines in the territory of other countries or the legitimate right of the countries affected to appropriate compensation in accordance with international law. In this connection, we would like to thank the Secretary-General for the periodic report he submitted to us today in document A/56/448. We note from the report that some progress, however slow, has been achieved in the efforts of the United Nations to strengthen these operations. The number of affected countries receiving direct support from the United Nations increased from 26 to 30 last year. In addition, international standards for mine clearance have been established under the auspices of the United Nations in order to take advantage of the accumulated experience of international bodies in mine action. The United Nations is also trying to draw lessons from its own experience in some countries in order to deal with mine-related emergencies and to improve information systems on mine action. The United Nations Development Programme also supports other new mine action programmes in other countries.

We also note the success of the campaign for assistance and contributions organized by some non-governmental organizations. This has to be expanded, and new ways have to be found to enlist the participation of civil society and the private sector in order to provide the necessary resources for those countries affected by mines.

In this connection, we would like warmly to thank the United Arab Emirates for its consolidation of the demining programme in southern Lebanon and for enhancing national capabilities in this regard. I should like also to stress what was stated — quite rightly — by the Secretary-General in paragraph 51 of his report, that as long as conflicts continue mine action will still continue. The report emphasizes that Afghanistan, one of the countries most affected by mines and exploded ordnance — particularly since the bombing of Afghan territory with all kinds of weapons, such as cluster bombs — will exacerbate the problem, particularly since 23 per cent of the weapons used in this war have not exploded, including smart weapons. These military actions force civilians to leave their land and to live in snow-covered areas that are replete with dormant mines and other kinds of unexploded ordnance, which is extremely lethal. Thus speedy international assistance to the Afghan people is needed in order to help them cope with this problem.

In conclusion, my delegation would like to refer to the United Nations strategy for the period 2001-2005 that is mentioned in the report of the Secretary-General on assistance in mine action. It is an attempt to devise a specific strategy to cope with the mine problem at the global level. We would request the Secretary-General to redouble his efforts to reconsider that strategy, so that it might reflect the real needs of all of the mine-affected countries, and so that the United Nations can meet this challenge effectively and successfully so as to build a world of peace, security and tranquillity.

Mr. Jacob (Israel): Israel is deeply aware of the grave humanitarian consequences of the irresponsible use of landmines. Accordingly, the Government of Israel attaches particular importance to actions aimed at preventing and minimizing human suffering in this regard.

We long for a day when civilian life will be free from the threat of anti-personnel landmines. The haunting echoes of shots fired long ago and of conflicts raging miles away have no place in civil society. They are a tragic outgrowth of war, striking the innocent, shattering civilian lives and tormenting families. Yet in the shadow of tragedy a glimmer of hope arises: people

from different nations, who clashed on battlefields yesterday, are clearing the minefields of today.

This, indeed, captures the most important theme of the effort against the devastation of anti-personnel landmines: cooperation. The report of the Secretary-General on assistance in mine action (A/56/448) reaffirms the realization, barely 10 years ago, that action by individual States alone could no longer defuse the humanitarian threat posed by anti-personnel landmines. This cooperation is even more relevant in post-conflict situations.

It should be emphasized that landmines are creatures of context. They are born in an atmosphere of terror and threats, just as they are weakened in the context of cooperation and goodwill between States.

Israel has taken concrete steps to reduce the proliferation and harmful effects of anti-personnel landmines in the Middle East and beyond. These steps include the following.

Israel has ceased all production of anti-personnel landmines. In 1994, it unilaterally declared a moratorium on the export of all types of anti-personnel mines. The moratorium was declared in recognition of the grave humanitarian consequences associated with anti-personnel landmines and the need, in this respect, for self-imposed restraint. In 1999, the moratorium was extended for an additional three-year period.

Israel ratified amended Protocol II to the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons, and submitted to the United Nations its first national annual report, in accordance with article 13, paragraph 4, of the Protocol.

Israel considers the issue of international cooperation in the areas of mine clearance, mine awareness and mine-victim rehabilitation to be of major importance. These initiatives contribute to the global efforts aimed at the alleviation of the humanitarian problems associated with mines.

In this context, for the past six years Israel, in conjunction with the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), has been involved in a mine-awareness project conducted in Angola which aims to educate the local population in different regions of the country as to the hazards of mines. Israeli involvement in this project has been upgraded this year, and currently four Israeli volunteers — financially supported by Israel — operate in the area. Israel has also substantially increased its financial contribution to that project.

The same policy can also be an important confidence-building measure. In this regard, Israel conducted, in 1997, a joint mine-clearance project with Jordan, in the Arava valley, in order to enable the agricultural utilization of the area. Similarly, in 1998, Israel, Jordan, Canada and Norway joined in a quadrilateral project aimed at mine clearance in the Jordan valley and at the medical rehabilitation of Jordanian mine victims. In this respect, Israel organized and hosted a workshop on the rehabilitation of mine victims in April of that year.

We believe that the measures Israel has taken will contribute to stability in our region. Israel also remains confident that the best way to achieve the ultimate goal of a total ban is through confidence-building measures such as cooperation in demining and reconciliation between past adversaries, which serve as a basis for future regional stability, security and peace.

Let us hope that the cooperation that has been illustrated here will likewise heal the world of the devastation caused by these devices and put an end to the hostilities that perpetuate them.

Mr. Lee Kie-cheon (Republic of Korea): At the outset, I would like to express my appreciation to the Secretary-General for having prepared a comprehensive report highlighting the achievements attained so far and the challenges that lie ahead in mine-action assistance.

Since the issue of mine action was adopted as an agenda item of the General Assembly in 1993, substantial progress has been made in international efforts to tackle this problem. As the Secretary-General notes in his report, there has been greater public and political awareness of the landmine problem in recent years. As a result, the production and use of anti-personnel landmines is on the wane, a de facto moratorium on the transfer of such weapons is coming into being, a number of areas have been demined, and millions of stockpiled landmines have been destroyed. Most importantly, there has been a significant decline in the number of mine-related casualties.

While that progress is laudable, we must not lose sight of the current reality. Landmines continue to pose a deadly threat to innocent civilians in conflict and post-conflict areas. Among the many victims are

women and children. Moreover, mines not only claim lives, they also impede socio-economic development, reconstruction efforts and humanitarian aid operations, as well as the return of refugees and other displaced persons. Throughout the United Nations system the work of many agencies has been encumbered by the presence of these insidious weapons.

Clearly there is a need for the international community to better address the plight of those in mine-affected countries. In tackling the problems associated with anti-personnel mines, a comprehensive approach is essential. Such an approach should encompass mine clearance, emergency assistance, mine awareness and resource mobilization.

The United Nations system, inter-governmental and non-governmental organizations (NGO), regional organizations and national Governments have become increasingly involved in mine action activities. My delegation is pleased to note the emergence in recent years of public-private partnerships for assistance in mine action, as well as the development of new mechanisms for enhanced coordination among donors and agencies.

In that context, I would like to stress the importance of the central coordinating role of the United Nations in generating synergy among diverse actors. In particular, my delegation would like to commend the efforts made by the United Nations Mine Action Service, which has served as the focal point for international mine action activities. We also appreciate the important work being carried out by other United Nations agencies, most notably the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF).

Let me take a few moments to comment on some of the latest developments in mine action summarized in the report of the Secretary-General.

First, my delegation welcomes the development by the United Nations of a concrete mine action strategy for the period 2001 to 2005, in response to General Assembly resolution 55/120. We consider this medium-term plan to be quite comprehensive and inclusive, in that it takes into account the views of a broad array of partners, including NGOs, international organizations, mine-affected countries and donor countries. By articulating common objectives and tangible goals for the United Nations mine action effort, it provides a viable framework for tackling the landmine problem strategically on both the national and the global levels.

Secondly, we commend the progress made by the United Nations in terms of operational support. As the Secretary-General notes in his report, the United Nations now provides direct support to 30 countries, including new assistance programmes and emergency programmes initiated by UNDP. Those programmes have highlighted the need to develop a mine action emergency response plan.

Thirdly, recognizing that a comprehensive information management system is essential for effective mine action, we note with satisfaction that the Inter-Agency Coordination Group recently endorsed the Information Management Policy for Mine Action. In particular, we are encouraged by the further development and deployment of the Information Management System for Mine Action, which is now in place in 17 countries, as well as the launch of an Electronic Mine Information Network (E-MINE) this past September.

In March 1999 we witnessed the entry into force of the Ottawa Convention, which aims at a total ban on anti-personnel mines. We also saw the entry into force of Amended Protocol II to the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons, which restricts the use of anti-personnel landmines. My delegation shares the view that the mine-ban Treaty provides a comprehensive framework for many aspects of mine action. However, Amended Protocol II also includes a humanitarian aspect, in that it bans the indiscriminate use of anti-personnel mines. In our view, those two mechanisms should carry equal weight in dealing with mine problems.

The Republic of Korea is committed to the global effort to protect civilians from the scourge of landmines. This year, my Government acceded to the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons and its Amended Protocol II. The Korean Government has, since 1997, also faithfully implemented an indefinite extension of its moratorium on the export of anti-personnel mines.

Furthermore, the Republic of Korea recognizes that one of the prerequisites for effective action is a substantial resource base, and has consequently supported various United Nations-led mine assistance programmes. Our Government has been participating in the Mine Action Support Group and has made annual

contributions to the Voluntary Trust Fund for Assistance in Mine Action. We share the Secretary-General's view that the United Nations should secure sound funding so as to meet growing requests from mine-affected countries. With that in mind, my Government will continue to make due contributions to this noble cause.

The Republic of Korea shares the concerns of the international community over the immense human suffering endured by those in mine-affected countries. We believe that only through concerted efforts and cooperation by the international community, with the United Nations as the focal point, will people in mine-affected countries be free to pursue their lives without fear of being struck by mines. I can assure the Assembly that the Republic of Korea will continue to take part in international efforts for that purpose.

Mr. Šimonović (Croatia): Every year my country takes part in the discussion on this agenda item, and will continue to do so as long as this problem exists. The Republic of Croatia has direct experience with the disastrous effects of mines, and therefore attaches the utmost importance to mine action assistance. My country welcomes all efforts leading towards a global ban on anti-personnel landmines and the elimination of existing stockpiles. We therefore support the commitment of the United Nations to facilitate this process and we wish to express our appreciation to the Secretary-General for providing such a comprehensive report on assistance in mine action.

It is estimated that Croatia has approximately 1.2 million anti-personnel landmines and other unexploded ordnance scattered over 4,000 square kilometres of its territory. Mine affected areas have not been used for many years and pose a major economic problem for the Government, as mines obstruct infrastructure development and reconstruction and the return and integration process. Missing maps for existing minefields present an additional obstacle in the mine-clearance process. I would therefore like to repeat my call on all those who are in a position to provide us with those maps to do so without further hesitation.

To engage in the mine-action process takes not only courage and time, but also substantial financial assets. The Croatian Government provides about 80 per cent of the funds required for implementing the national demining programme, including World Bank loans and other credit lines. Unfortunately, due to the sheer magnitude of the problem, and even with all the donations and loans that have been granted, Croatia will not be in a position to meet all the remaining needs and complete the programme as planned. I therefore implore all donor countries to support our efforts. At this juncture, I would like to express our profound gratitude to all those individuals, organizations and countries that invested their valuable time and gave their financial support for the benefit of mine-action efforts in Croatia.

The development and implementation of new, sophisticated technologies in mine detection is expected in the near future. We hope that this will accelerate the mine clearance procedure, lower its cost and increase its reliability and safety. In this respect, a Croatian team of experts is seeking ways to devise the safest and most cost-effective projects to facilitate efficient mine action. The Croatian Mine Action Centre (CROMAC) is currently running several projects, involving research and development. CROMAC has also set up a test field, with the aid of the European Commission, in which it has tested 29 different metal detectors. CROMAC also runs tests on several demining machines.

Most of us would agree that the conclusion of the Ottawa Convention in 1997 was a turning point in facilitating mine action throughout the world. Much has been done in the meantime, but more needs to be accomplished. We call upon those States that remain outside the framework of the Ottawa Convention to join the majority of the world's States and work together to eradicate these weapons.

Croatia looks to the follow-up of the Ottawa process to act as a catalyst for genuinely advancing mine action in all its aspects. It was precisely the humanitarian nature of the Ottawa movement that enabled it to make so great a contribution to the creation of political will and readiness to support this praiseworthy initiative. On the basis of our own experience, we firmly believe that more forceful action is still required at the national, regional and global levels.

At the national level, Croatia has already enacted legislation confirming the validity of the Ottawa Convention, and is making the final preparations in drafting new legislation on the use, stockpiling, production and transfer of anti-personnel mines in all their aspects. When adopted by the Parliament, the new

legislation, the draft of which is being reviewed in the relevant Government ministries, will criminalize the use, production, stockpiling or transfer of anti-personnel landmines. I should like to stress that, until that time, according to our Constitution, the provisions of the Convention will take precedence over our national legislation, and its implementation is therefore guaranteed.

Mr. Kamara (Sierra Leone), Vice-President, took the Chair.

Furthermore, the Croatian Ministry of Defence recently adopted a Dynamic Plan for the Destruction of Stockpiled Anti-personnel Mines, which calls for the destruction of Croatia's stockpiles by October 2002, well before the March 2003 deadline. The initial destruction of stockpiles in the summer of 1999 has not yet been followed up due to the reorganization of the defence sector.

As I mentioned earlier, an extensive research programme is being conducted in the field of mine action in Croatia, and the scientific breakthroughs that will certainly result will undoubtedly be of benefit in the further fight against this scourge.

Croatia will continue to work hard with all interested countries in supporting the Ottawa Convention in the next phase. At the recent Third Meeting of the States Parties to the Convention, in Managua, Croatia made a further contribution by assuming, together with Australia, the co-chairmanship of the Standing Committee on Stockpile Destruction.

At the present time, when the United Nations finds itself at the threshold of a new era, entrusted with a broader responsibility for the world's affairs, we are counting on its continued leadership and coordination in the process of eradicating the scourge of landmines. I can assure the Assembly that Croatia will remain actively engaged in this process.

Mr. Ling (Belarus) (*spoke in Russian*): The Republic of Belarus welcomes the Secretary-General's report on assistance in mine action, as well as the coordinating role played by the United Nations in this area.

As a State whose territory was the site of intensive hostilities during two world wars, Belarus fully shares the mine-related humanitarian concerns of the international community and, on the whole, supports the initiatives aimed at prohibiting the use, stockpiling, production and transfer of anti-personnel landmines. Our country does not now produce, nor has it ever has produced, anti-personnel landmines. In 1995, Belarus signed a moratorium on the export of anti-personnel landmines. This moratorium has been extended through the end of 2002.

At present, the Republic of Belarus is not ready to adhere to the 1997 Convention on the Prohibition, Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-personnel Mines and on Their Destruction, since it does not yet possess the financial and technological resources needed to fulfil the basic requirements of that document — that is, the demining of the territory of the country and the destruction of the existing stockpiles of anti-personnel landmines.

Belarus continues to suffer from the consequences of the Second World War. Large quantities of remaining unexploded ordnance, including anti-personnel landmines, still kill and maim the civilian population. On average, up to 7,000 items of unexploded ordnance, including anti-personnel landmines, are detected and destroyed in Belarus every year. The last complete demining process in Belarus was conducted in two areas from 1992 to 1994. More than 3,000 hectares of territory were cleared and almost 130,000 items of unexploded ordnance were detected and destroyed. No complete demining process in the territory has been conducted since then because of the lack of financial resources.

The Republic of Belarus is experiencing serious problems with regard to the destruction of considerable stockpiles of anti-personnel landmines left in the country after the break-up of the Soviet Union. Special technologies are required for destroying these landmines. These technologies will help us to avoid a new ecological disaster in the country, which, for more than 15 years, has been dealing with the widespread radioactive contamination that resulted from the Chernobyl nuclear power plant disaster. There are no such technologies in Belarus.

Belarus strictly abides by its obligations under international agreements in the field of international security, non-proliferation, arms control and disarmament. We gained experience in eliminating conventional armaments under the terms of the Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe. Despite the heavy financial burden, our country, working almost on its own, without outside financial assistance, fulfilled

its international obligations and eliminated almost 10 per cent of all the heavy military equipment destroyed in Europe under this Treaty.

It was precisely that experience that led us to take a very careful and responsible approach to adhering to the Ottawa Convention. The process will be implemented stage by stage and will be closely synchronized with the financial and technological assistance we obtain for demining and the destruction of stockpiles of anti-personnel landmines. Belarus will be able to fully adhere to the Convention when it becomes clear that our country is able to destroy its stockpiles of anti-personnel landmines within the time limits established by the Convention.

We are interested in receiving international assistance for the further demining of our territory and for the destruction of stockpiles of anti-personnel landmines, and we would welcome any relevant proposals and initiatives on cooperation in these fields.

Information on the need to render assistance to Belarus in these areas was given to the participants in the international workshop on mine-related problems organized by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Belarus and held in Minsk in March 2000, as well as to the representatives of the United Nations Mine Action Service (UNMAS) who visited Belarus on an assessment mission in August 2000. The report on the results of the UNMAS assessment mission made reference to the conclusive need to assist Belarus in demining its territory and destroying its stockpiles of anti-personnel landmines.

In conclusion, I wish to emphasize that the Republic of Belarus, while not a legal party to the Ottawa Convention, implements its requirements in practice and is not a source of mine-threat proliferation.

Mr. Sevilla Somoza (Nicaragua) (*spoke in Spanish*): I have the honour to speak on behalf of the Central American countries and the Dominican Republic.

At the outset, we wish to thank and congratulate the Secretary-General and the staff of the Secretariat who drafted the report on assistance in mine action in document A/56/448 and its addendums 1 and 2. The report contains complete information on United Nations policy on mine action, on progress achieved by the International Committee of the Red Cross and other international and regional organizations, and on the work of the Voluntary Trust Fund for Assistance in Mine Action and other demining programmes in this area.

In the report, which was prepared pursuant to a request made by the General Assembly in resolution 55/120 of 6 December 2000, we see the main innovations and achievements of, as well as the problems encountered in 2001 by the international community in its mine action, giving priority to intersectoral issues that affect all who are interested in the fight against landmines: global coordination and mobilization of resources; assistance to national and local authorities; emergency assistance; information management; quality control, training and standards; and publicity activities. The Secretary-General stresses the fact that

> "Significant progress has been made over the past 12 months in the field of mine action, particularly in terms of strategic planning, operational support, coordination and information management". (*A/56/448, para. 2*)

The report indicates that the United Nations system is now providing direct support to 30 countries, four more than in 2000, and that, while new programmes have been launched, two of those begun earlier have reached a stage at which it is possible considerably to reduce the level of international and United Nations technical assistance. While pointing to this progress, however, the Secretary-General also indicates the concern of the international community at the fact that landmines continue to be sown in various countries.

Another new element of the past 12 months is that, under United Nations auspices and with the instrumental support of the Geneva International Centre for Humanitarian Demining, a review has been prepared of the International Standards For Humanitarian Mine Clearance Operations published in 1997. The Revised International Mine Action Standards take into account the experience accumulated over the past four years and cover activities which previously had not been addressed, such as mine awareness and stockpile destruction.

After a number of countries of the Central American region managed to lay to rest the spectre of the civil wars that afflicted their populations in the 1980s, their authorities, with peace already a reality,

invited the Organization of American States (OAS) in 1991 to participate in and support a mine-clearance programme, undertaken as a clear sign of the will of their peoples to put the conflicts of the past behind them and to begin a new phase of progress and economic and social development.

In response to that appeal, the OAS created the Assistance Programme for Demining in Central America (PADCA), with the support and advice of the Inter-American Defense Board. In spite of some difficulties, such as its temporary stoppage because of the fury with which Hurricane Mitch struck the area, the Programme has developed with great success, enjoying the solidarity of the other States members of the organization and of the international community as a whole. In an effort to cover all the aspects of the problem of anti-personnel landmines, the OAS expanded the PADCA and created the Comprehensive Action against Anti-personnel Mines (AICMA) in 1998, within the Unit for the Promotion of Democracy. This programme incorporated PADCA and is a focal point for the OAS in other sectors related to mine action.

The programme is mainly humanitarian in nature, as it seeks to restore the safety and trust of citizens, reducing and to the greatest possible extent eliminating the threat and danger of anti-personnel landmines and other explosive devices, and restoring land use in affected areas to agriculture and livestock-raising. This has been a multilateral programme, with the participation, in addition to the OAS, of other international organizations and various donor States. Its implementation has enjoyed the participation of the authorities and civil society of the Central American countries concerned. Four Central American countries have enjoyed the assistance of the OAS programme: Costa Rica, Guatemala, Honduras and Nicaragua.

The programme provides a significant amount of logistical support and necessary equipment to the countries affected. The technical equipment includes mine detectors, protective clothing and other specialized equipment that allow the safe detection and destruction of anti-personnel landmines, giving the confidence necessary to the deminers in carrying out their work. Other types of support that are also part of the comprehensive AICMA package include complementary rations, life insurance and medical coverage.

Each of the countries that benefit from the programme contributes its own demining staff and units. The number of deminers supporting the operations has grown to almost 900 in Central America, because the need to widen the effort has become obvious. The countries affected by anti-personnel landmines have provided logistical support commensurate with their national capacities, such as medical, emergency and evacuation services in case of accidents suffered by programme staff.

Approximately 30 international supervisors are provided through the Inter-American Defense Board, which includes the following countries: Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Colombia, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras and Venezuela. Other countries, such as Canada and the United States, have through their military personnel provided periodic training or technical advice on demining and stockpile destruction. International military monitoring activities, training and technical assistance are coordinated through the Assistance Mission for Mine Clearance in Central America, based in Managua, Nicaragua.

In Honduras, mine-clearance tasks began in September 1995. Since then, 10 operations modules have been created. As a result of these operations, many affected regions have been gradually cleared, recovered and handed over to local authorities for development. In November 2000, Honduras became the first State member of the OAS entirely to eliminate its stockpiled mines when the Honduran army destroyed its reserves of almost 8,000.

In the case of Costa Rica, demining operations on the Nicaraguan border began in October 1996. With AICMA support, the Ministry of Public Security is undertaking demining and public information activities in order to prevent accidents among the civilian population. Since Costa Rica has no stockpiled mines, the conclusion of demining operations will make the country a zone free of anti-personnel landmines.

As a follow-up to the signing of the peace agreements in Guatemala, the OAS developed a support programme for mine clearance and undetonated devices in 1998. The national programme is the national responsibility of the Coordinating Commission of the Congress of the Republic for Demining. Likewise, in this new project, the following have joined the effort: the Association of Volunteer Firefighters, the Guatemalan Army and the

demobilized members of the Guatemalan National Revolutionary Unit.

The Guatemalan operations are more than unique in the OAS programme, because the main threat comes from 8,000 unexploded devices, including mortars, artillery shells, bombs and hand grenades, which are dispersed throughout the Guatemalan territory. The demining process requires extensive cooperation among the three operational components, as well as coordinated communications efforts with the population of the affected areas, to locate and destroy these dangerous devices.

Thus far, the greatest challenge for demining in Central America has been in Nicaragua. The Government of Nicaragua has reported approximately 135,000 mines that were buried in the country during the 1980's. Among the mined areas, there are electrical towers, bridges, communications installations and hydroelectric plants, as well as the borders with Honduras and Costa Rica. Although Nicaraguan Government officials have reported the elimination of more than 62,000 mines, at present approximately 73,000 mines have yet to be located and destroyed.

In addition, as follow-up to the signing and ratification of the Ottawa Convention, the Nicaraguan Army has destroyed 90,000 stockpiled anti-personnel mines. The OAS and members of the international community have supported the destruction of the stockpiles through international experts who have observed the process.

Since 1997, in collaboration with the Government of Sweden, Nicaragua has been involved in a pilot programme to support the physical and psychological rehabilitation of mine victims. Through this programme, more than 300 persons who lack social security or other insurance benefits have been helped with transportation from their communities to a centre for rehabilitation for lodging, food services, therapy, prostheses and medication.

El Salvador is another country in the region afflicted by the scourge of mines, which was a grave problem to be resolved after the signing of the peace agreements so that the country could return to normalcy, especially in the areas of former conflict. In El Salvador, the Government, in cooperation with the armed forces, the Frente Farabundo Martí para la Liberación Nacional (FMLN), the United Nations Children's Fund and the United Nations Observer Mission in El Salvador, made major efforts to finance on its own a demining programme that was concluded successfully in 1997, when the United Nations certified that the programme had been 97 per cent completed.

The OAS programme has continued to make progress and has taken up two other countries, Peru and Ecuador, whose common border contains some 130,000 anti-personnel mines, according to OAS statistics. In the Central American programme, new technologies have begun to be used, and with the support of the United States, trained dogs are being employed to detect anti-personnel mines. This has increased the quality of the system. With the support of Japan, a mechanical mine-clearance team will be working in Nicaragua.

The national efforts of the Central American countries require continued international support to successfully complete their mine-clearance tasks and to achieve a Central America free of anti-personnel mines. If all continues to go well, the OAS programme will be satisfactorily completed in four years, as scheduled.

The Third Meeting of States Parties to the Ottawa Convention was held in Managua from 18 to 21 September this year. In view of the international situation following the barbaric terrorist attacks in New York, Washington and Pennsylvania, the delegates of more than 90 States in Nicaragua at that distressing time gave a vote of confidence to peace, to the peaceful settlement of conflicts and to civilization, and resoundingly rejected hatred, the law of the jungle and mad, cowardly violence.

The Managua Declaration reaffirms, *inter alia*, the unwavering commitment of the parties to the Convention to the total eradication of anti-personnel mines and to coping with their brutal and inhuman effects. Likewise, it appeals to all States that continue to use, produce or acquire anti-personnel mines to put an end to that activity immediately. As for the States that have already declared their commitment to the purposes of the Convention, the Declaration urges them to recognize that the continued use of these mines is a clear violation of their commitment.

In broad support of the Convention, more than 120 ratifications and 21 signatures have been received, including from more than 40 States affected by mines. It was also recognized that the new international norm established by the Convention was a demonstration of

success in the Convention's fulfilment, including the conduct of many States that are not parties to the Convention but respect its provisions.

All of humanity will celebrate the day when States clearly demonstrate the will never again to produce or plant another anti-personnel mine. The Central American programme is an example to be followed by other regions of the world affected by this scourge of our time.

Mr. Cappagli (Argentina) *(spoke in Spanish)*: The Ottawa Convention set forth as an international obligation the demand to eliminate anti-personnel mines, which cause grave harm to civilian populations and whose harmful effects persist for decades, even long after the conflicts that led to their use are resolved.

Our region is among those that have best responded to this commitment, since almost all the countries of Latin America and the Caribbean are parties to this instrument. The Political Declaration of MERCOSUR, Bolivia and Chile as a Zone of Peace, and a number of resolutions of the General Assembly of the OAS, also seek to make this region a zone free of anti-personnel mines.

The entry into force of the Ottawa Convention gave the international community a valuable legal instrument to make progress in disarmament by prohibiting a category of weapons, as well as to strengthen the principles of international humanitarian law. For this reason, it is essential that those countries that have not yet signed the Convention do so as soon as possible, with a view to facilitating the coordinated and effective action of the international community.

Argentina is gratified that the most recent report of the Secretary-General on assistance in mine action (A/56/448) concludes that in the last 12 months, considerable progress has been made in mine action, especially as regards strategic planning, operational support, coordination and information management.

Argentina ratified the Ottawa Convention on 14 September 1999 and presented its second report on transparency measures on 30 May 2001, reflecting the determination of our country to fulfil its obligations under the Convention in a process that works towards the definitive eradication of anti-personnel mines from our territory.

In that report, Argentina expresses the fact that there are anti-personnel mines on its territory, in the Malvinas Islands. The position of our country on the mines that are there is contained in the interpretive statement that was made when the Convention was ratified. This fact was reported to the United Nations Secretariat when information was provided in the framework of resolutions related to assistance in mine clearance. On 11 October 2001, in Buenos Aires, the Governments of Argentina and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland reached an agreement through an exchange of notes, under the sovereignty safeguard formula, in order to conduct a feasibility study on demining in the Malvinas Islands.

Demining in the world has become an extraordinarily important humanitarian task. Countries that are afflicted by the existence of mined land must also confront the great deterioration in economic and social conditions, the paralysis of their healthcare and sanitation systems and the paralysis of their national infrastructure. Anti-personnel mine clearance is a priority and necessary task for public safety, economic and social development and the protection of human life.

International effort is aimed at financial and technical cooperation among donor countries and contributors to the various national demining programmes developed throughout the world. As part of this effort, Argentina is contributing advisers and experts in mine clearance who conduct training in demining operations.

Argentina firmly supports the objectives of international organizations in mine clearance and encourages the initiatives of specific governments aimed at strengthening international cooperation.

However, the total prohibition of anti-personnel mines must be directly linked to cooperation in mine clearance and assistance to victims. This is where Argentina stands with the contributing countries, providing human resources able to share their full expertise and training in mine-clearance tasks. Awareness of the humanitarian context, particularly the technical context, of this task calls for the participation of Argentina's military in demining throughout the world and encourages our country to continue its work in this direction.

The Training Centre for Humanitarian Demining and the mobile training teams are the most important

contribution being made by our country. They are open to ongoing cooperation on the basis of the a priori recognition that mine clearance is the great task of us all.

As the report on transparency measures under the Ottawa Convention makes clear in the section on the status of stockpile destruction programmes, the Argentine army has begun to consolidate its stockpiles. The destruction plan will be carried out during 2002. The navy will begin its destruction plan at the end of this year, and it will last 11 months.

Technical assistance for mine clearance in Angola, an offer to contribute to demining along the border between Peru and Ecuador in the framework of the Military Observer Mission, the participation of an Argentine army engineer corps in the framework of the United Nations Iraq-Kuwait Observation Mission (UNIKOM) and the work of Argentine military experts in Central America are some of the concrete actions carried out by Argentina in the context of international aid and cooperation for humanitarian demining.

Special mention should also be made of Argentina's contribution through the so-called White Helmets initiative. This institution brings together volunteer experts in humanitarian assistance, who are recruited in various countries and are made available to the international community, through the coordination of the United Nations, to be called into service by affected countries or multilateral organizations.

Argentina believes that the indiscriminate injury and the high percentage of civilian victims resulting from the use of anti-personnel landmines demands the urgent and unreserved commitment of all countries. That is why we encourage the United Nations to continue its mine action efforts and to focus resources in those areas where the work of the Organization is most effective and necessary.

Mr. Gasparic (Slovenia): Slovenia has associated itself with the European Union's statement on assistance in mine action. Since my country pays special attention to human security, and to demining and mine-victim assistance in particular, we would like to share with the Assembly additional thoughts and information on assistance in mine action.

Landmines kill and maim innocents, regardless of age and long after conflicts are over. Landmines cannot recognize peace. They continue to obstruct normal life and livelihood. They are a heinous threat to human security and a formidable obstacle to social stability and prosperity.

It is very encouraging, therefore, that the efforts invested in mine action are starting to bear fruit. There are fewer mine victims, fewer minefields and fewer mine stocks on Earth already. The 1997 Nobel Peace Prize was awarded to the International Campaign to Ban Landmines and to Ms. Jody Williams to remind us that it is quintessential persistence that brings results. Hence, we must not give in to complacency now; rather, we must keep striving to protect future generations from the misery that mines bring.

Slovenia signed the Ottawa Convention in 1997 and ratified it in 1998, and we are determined to destroy our mine stocks by 2003. We have already destroyed around 50,000 landmines, which amounts to more than one third of our stocks. We have also started the internal procedure to adhere to Amended Protocol II of the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons. Slovenian foreign policy pays great attention to human security, and we are fully committed to the objectives of international mine action.

In this spirit, the Government of Slovenia has established the International Trust Fund for Demining and Mine Victims Assistance to support post-conflict rehabilitation in South-Eastern Europe, where a large quantity of mines remaining from conflicts are taking high tolls. They have also prevented refugees from returning, the population from resuming normal life and economic activity from reviving.

The International Trust Fund has become, during three years of operation, the most cost-effective mine-action organization in the region. The International Trust Fund has established genuine partnership with the authorities in mine-affected countries and with international structures involved in mine-action projects, in particular United Nations structures. The International Trust Fund has cleared two thirds of the territory demined so far in Bosnia and Herzegovina and has spread its activities to Croatia, Albania, Yugoslavia and, most recently, Macedonia. The International Trust Fund has cleared over 7 million square metres of mine-contaminated land at a cost as low as $2.50 per square metre.

The International Trust Fund has attracted generous donations from the United States and a large

number of important European donors, including the European Union.

We would like to use this opportunity to thank all donors for their valuable support. We would like to inform them of our continuing commitment to the activities of the International Trust Fund and to reassure them that their donations are applied in the most effective and transparent manner. They represent an enormous difference and new hope to affected communities. They bring back life without fear.

Afghanistan serves as a fresh reminder today of how mine affliction may contribute to a vicious circle of misery with tragic and far-reaching consequences. Mine action in Afghanistan is investment in local and regional stability, as much as it is investment in our own security. Let us keep mine action working for us.

The Acting President: We have heard the last speaker in the debate on this item this morning. We shall continue to hear speakers in the debate on this item this afternoon at 3 p.m.

The meeting rose at 1.05 p.m.